Putting the Puzzle Together

for the City of Edgar, Nebraska

COMMUNITY OF EDGAR
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
ASSESSMENT & PLAN
2003

"The small rural community of Edgar, Nebraska is trying to survive and thrive. In order to do so, community members are sorting through many community puzzle pieces to plan for the future. Some of the puzzle pieces include information technology, business survival, community vitality, an aging population, creating and attracting new businesses and the need for a new community center."

--Phyllis Schoenholz, <u>tangents</u>, Technologies Across Nebraska Newsletter, Fall 2003

<u>*Background:*</u>

An Information Planning Task force for the Community of Edgar was assembled in mid-2002 to address the Information Technology "piece of the puzzle" for Edgar. This diverse Task Force received one of eight $2500 Information Technology planning grants awarded in 2002 by the Nebraska Technology Commission. Using this planning grant, a Needs Assessment Survey of the Edgar community, including a section on Information Technology, was conducted by the citizens of the Edgar community and analyzed by Kay Payne of the UN-K Center for Rural Research & Development. A need for a Community Center was identified as a priority need for the community of Edgar.

The City of Edgar submitted a Community Development Block Grant application for a community center, using the results of the Needs Survey. In July, 2003, the Governor of Nebraska and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development awarded the City of Edgar a $250,000 matching grant for a new community center. The design and future use of this Edgar Community Center will address and incorporate an element relating to Information Technology.

Compiled by
Edgar Community Information Planning Task Force
September 2003

City of Edgar Information Technology Plan – Vision Statement:

The Community of Edgar strives to become a recognized area leader in the development and promotion of Information Technology opportunities for the benefit of individual citizens, business interests and the collective well-being of Edgar and the entire area. We want to use the new Edgar Community Center as a catalyst to begin fulfilling this vision.

Information Technology Plan Priorities:

To support the vision of the future of technology in the Edgar community and the goal of utilizing the new Community Center to begin fulfilling this vision, the members of the Information Technology Task Force have identified the following priorities for the Edgar Community:

Technology Infrastructure
"There are vast opportunities for both business and individual growth if the latest and best technological infrastructure is available."

Technology Literacy & Access
"If the right tools are available, opportunities are endless with some educational instruction and assistance for its citizens."

Economic Development & E-Commerce
"The economic vitality and viability of our small rural community can be significantly enhanced with E-Commerce and E-Marketing, which could develop into E-Edgar."

Revitalized Community Web Site
"We can promote and be proud of our Edgar community through an updated and exciting website, our window to the electronic world."

Time Frame of this Information Technology Plan:

Each of these identified priority areas are part of the puzzle that must be put together to make Edgar a leader in the development and promotion of Information Technology opportunities for the community and the area. This Information Technology Plan attempts to identify the activities, in a phased approach, to be targeted in the next <u>five years</u>. Using the Plan as a blue-print, the Edgar community can pursue its goal of Excellence in Information Technology, with the new Community Center as a significant component of the plan.

Information Technology Action Plans

The first piece of the puzzle relates to the Action Plans for the planning and programming of the new Edgar Community Center.

Technology Infrastructure:

An Infrastructure is the foundation for all communications. Getting quality infrastructure to the rural communities of Nebraska is a constant challenge. Assuring that the new Edgar Community Center includes a quality electronic infrastructure is one key element of our technology plan for the community.

Current E-Readiness: The infrastructure in our community is pretty good and rated at 3 on a scale of 1 to 4, whereby many residences and businesses have cable modem, DSL or wireless service available. Currently we have multiple suppliers of high speed internet access, including Galaxy Cable, wireless DTN Speednet and Alltel DSL service.

Target R-Readiness: The rate of progress of Information Technology dictates that we constantly strive to keep pace with the available infrastructure. Our target readiness is a level 4, whereby all residences and businesses have cable modem, DSL or wireless service available and the satisfaction with broadband services is high.

Action Areas (now to two year time frame):

1. The new Edgar Community Center will be built as a "smart building" with an electronic infrastructure that includes the necessary wiring and other components. High speed, fiber, T-1 and broadband service capability, to name a few, will be considered and possibly included in the plans for the building.

2. The plans for the new Edgar Community Center will incorporate space(s) for an Information Technology Learning Center, including teleconferencing capability for the community and the area.

3. The plans for the new Edgar Community Center will incorporate space(s) for a multi-media center with access and appeal to a diverse and wide user base.

4. Current IT resource providers will be included in the planning and final design phase of the new Edgar Community Center.

5. The City of Edgar and the IT Task Force will continue to encourage more improvements from the current (and future) IT resource providers to the citizens of Edgar and the surrounding rural community.

Information Technology Action Plans

Technology Literacy & Access:

Technology cannot be utilized to its potential without a clear understanding of how to use it and the availability of equipment. From the Needs Survey, 62% of Edgar's households owned computers. Of these 161 households with computers, the majority (55%) had dial up access to the Internet. Another 32 had wireless access and the remaining 5% had other types of access, mostly DSL. One fifth of the computers did not have Internet access.

Current E-Readiness: Based on the results of the Edgar Needs Survey and Assessment, completed in Feb-March, 2003, the community of Edgar would rate a 3 in technology literacy, whereby over 50% of the households are on-line. The community of Edgar would rate a 1 as to access because public access to computers and the Internet is very limited in the city and only available at the Sandy Creek School for its students without such access in their homes.

Target E-Readiness: In order to realize the benefits of Information Technology, community members and businesses must have access to this technology and must know how to use it. The target readiness for Technology Literacy is 4 whereby at least 75% of the households are online and at least 75% of adults are Internet users. The target readiness for Technology Access for the Community of Edgar is 2 whereby public access to computers and the Internet is available in at lease one location twenty or more hours a week.

Action Areas (two to three year time frame):

1. The new multi-media center of the Edgar Community Center will include computers and other equipment needed for a Technology Learning Center. Fund raising events will be undertaken to provide such resources.

2. From the Edgar Needs Survey indicating that more than half of the households (52%) have at least one person interested in computer education classes, the new Edgar Community Center will include programs and classes to enhance the IT literacy of its constituents. The University of Nebraska Extension program will be one key resource in the delivery of such programs, such as the Master Navigator Internet training program.

3. Work the area schools, community colleges and other out-reach resources to describe the vision and end encourage the use of the facilities of the Edgar Community Center as an area IT Learning and Multi-Media Center.

Information Technology Action Plans

Technology Literacy & Access (continued):

4.   The allocation of space in the Edgar Community Center as a multi-media center will include the necessary components to become recognized as a library. This facility will include public access computers and internet access as part of its multi-media resources.   In order to establish this multi-media/library element within the new Community Center,   working relationships and agreements with the following groups must be explored and established:

> Existing area libraries
> Nebraska Library Commission
> Department of Education
> Existing book mobiles

5.   Explore existing grant programs, such as the Gates Foundation, for assistance in furnishing the multi-media Center for public access equipment.

6.   Identify and encourage the use of this multi-media facility within the Edgar Community Center by area individuals and groups that may not have such access available to them, including:

> home schooled students in the area
> senior citizens
> migrant Hispanic population
> English as a Second Language (ESL) participants.

Information Technology Action Plans

Economic Development & E-Commerce:

As a small rural community, the citizens and leadership of the Edgar community realize that adequate infrastructure and technology literacy are necessary to maintain the economic viability of existing businesses and possibly recruit new businesses to the community.

Current E-Readiness: In the Needs Survey, 71% of the businesses that responded to the survey used the Internet connection to search for business information; 64% for business e-mail and 56% for purchasing materials. Few businesses used the Internet to market products or services through their own web sites. The current readiness would be rated 2 whereby there is some recognition in the community that information technology is an economic development tool and some local businesses are using information technology to improve productivity and expand markets.

Target E-Readiness: Within two to three years and in association with the building of the new Community/Information Center, the target readiness would be upgraded to 3 whereby economic development efforts assist in developing IT business niches and most of the business interests in the community are using information technology effectively to improve productivity and expand markets and at least 50% of the businesses have a web site and 85% of the businesses are online.

Action Plans (now to five year time frame):

1.   Expand the upcoming Department of Economic Development Business Retention and Expansion Survey, scheduled for Nov. 13 and 14 in Clay County, to include a survey of all major businesses in Edgar as to their current usage, capabilities and needs for e-commerce, e-marketing and training.

2.   Work with appropriate resources to develop programs for e-commerce courses and training that respond to these needs identified in the business survey. Plan to continue such courses when the Community Center is built.

3.   Identify, explore and expand the use of information technology by existing or new Edgar businesses to develop new "business niches" utilizing the Community Center facility. These could include e-government services, e-agricultural tourism, e-entrepreneurship.

Information Technology Action Plans

Revitalized Community Web Site:

Communication via the internet is becoming (if not already) the preferred mode of information sharing. Sharing information on the advantages, strengths, services and capabilities of the Edgar community will and must continue to occur via the community website, www.ci.edgar.ne.us.

Current E-Readiness: The current level of readiness for the Edgar community web site is 3 in that a web site exists.

Target E-Readiness: The target level of readiness for the Edgar community web site is 4 in that the web site is revitalized, frequently updated and linked to other pertinent resources.

Action Plans (within the next 12 months):

1. The current website will be reviewed and updated via NPPD "coupons" available for such updates. A person or group in the community will be identified as responsible for the periodic update of the Edgar community web site.

2. The web site will be expanded to include information and updates on the new Community Center, including plans and programs for this facility relative to its function as an Information Technology Center, multi-media center and upcoming training and education programs at this center.

3. The NPPD Nebraska Economic Development Information Online (NEDI) information will be completed for Edgar and then linked to the Edgar website.

4. A NPPD Community Facts Book will be developed and completed for Edgar and linked to the Edgar website.

Attachments:
Information Technology Section of the 2003 Edgar Needs Survey
Article in tangents, Technologies across Nebraska Newsletter, Fall 2003